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282104Z Dec 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 011959

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DEPT FOR WHA/AND
DEPT FOR INL/RM, INL/LP

E.O. 12956: N/A

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: MINI-DUBLIN GROUP MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

11. (SBU) Summary: On December 14, 2005, representatives from various European countries and the U.S. met to review the Group's annual report on Colombia and to solicit additional information from member countries. The report's main point is that eradication and interdiction numbers for Colombia are at a record high. This year's numbers will reflect over 166,000 hectares of coca eradicated (equivalent to 183 metric tons) and over 300 metric tons of cocaine captured. While street prices in the U.S. have increased, the price of cocaine in Europe has remained stable. Ecuador's request that the U.N. undertake a new study on the effects of glyphosate on human health was brought up, with no local United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) support for the idea. Glyphosate use in Ecuador is 40 times larger than the amount sprayed in Colombia near the border with Ecuador. Colombia has shown its commitment to the global fight against drugs by providing funds and property for UNODC use. Support for Colombia's demobilization efforts is needed. European countries are concerned about Colombia's borders and about new trafficking routes. End Summary.

Background -----

12. (SBU) Ambassadors and representatives from various European countries including Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, the Czech Republic, the European Union, and the U.S. participated in the biannual meeting in Bogota of the Mini-Dublin Group, presided over by Spain.

Coca-cultivated Areas -----

13. (SBU) On the issue of reduction of areas cultivated, Sandro Calvani, the UNODC representative to Colombia, informed attendees that the UN's Integrated Illicit Crop Monitoring System (SIMCI) has not completed its 2005 study of areas under coca cultivation. SIMCI is still in the phase of downloading the information. SIMCI may be able to provide a preliminary assessment to the donor nations (UK, USA, Canada, etc.) by the end of February or the beginning of March. The official report would not be publicly available until the end of May. Calvani stated that SIMCI had had productive meetings with the U.S. Crime and Narcotics Center (CNC), the entity responsible for official U.S. government figures on illicit crops. He said that, although there were different SIMCI and CNC figures on the number of hectares under cultivation, both study methodologies were valid. Calvani added that since both methodologies are correct, but different, this accounted for the difference in reported hectareage with coca.

Eradication and Interdiction -----

14. (SBU) Ambassador Wood gave a recap of 2005 eradication figures: over 136,000 hectares sprayed and over 30,000 hectares manually eradicated to date. The total for the year will exceed 166,000 hectares of coca eliminated, which is equivalent to 183 metric tons (mt) of cocaine off the streets.

15. (SBU) He informed attendees that on the interdiction front the GOC, with USG support, had captured or destroyed over 165 mt of cocaine HCL within the country, with most of the interdiction accomplished by the Colombian National Police and the Navy. Transit area seizures amounted to another 139 mt. Between eradication and interdiction over 487 mt of cocaine would not reach its destination.

16. (SBU) Ambassador Wood highlighted that in November U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Director John Walters announced that there had been a 30 percent increase in the street price of heroin and a 19 percent increase in the street price of cocaine. In a quick survey of the countries' representatives, France, Spain, and the UK said the street price of cocaine had remained stable, while in the UK wholesale prices had dropped slightly.

17. (SBU) Calvani chimed in that the reduction of availability did not necessarily result in a price increase on the street in Europe. The wholesale price of cocaine in Europe is more than double the price in the USA. Traffickers have more leeway to absorb the rising costs until they become significant. When the cost of cocaine rises to a certain level, street prices may be affected.

Glyphosate Issue

18. (SBU) Ambassador Wood said that he understood that there were doubts about the Organization of American States (OAS) study on glyphosate, even among OAS members. To his knowledge, the issue had never been discussed in the OAS, nor was there any indication that the OAS as an organization was unhappy with the study or wanted someone else to take up the issue. He recalled from his experience in the United Nations (UN) that the UN does not ordinarily pre-empt regional organizations without full consultation with them. Ambassador Wood commented that we wanted to focus on the scientific facts, whatever they are. Therefore, from the U.S. point of view, the best course of action would be: (1) for the OAS itself to review the study to assess the scientific merits of the findings and (2) to suspend other action until then.

19. (SBU) Calvani concurred with Ambassador Wood. He made explicit mention of Ecuador and said that the UN office in Quito had "gotten ahead of themselves." They had even gone so far as to estimate the costs of a UN study, at a price that he characterized as "absurd" (his word). He also noted that there was great reluctance inside the UN to take up the issue and that there already had been a decision, following a high-level meeting, that, if a study were done, UNODC would have to play a part.

Spraying in the National Parks - A Chemical Perspective

10. (SBU) Ambassador Wood said that we were very near to receiving approval to spray in the Colombian national parks. To place spraying into perspective, Ambassador Wood said it requires 550 kilograms (kgs) of liquid chemicals to process one hectare of coca leaf into cocaine HCL, chemicals that are all dumped into the ground after use. He compared this with five kgs of glyphosate used to spray that same hectare, with those five kgs not going into the soil in an active state. He also compared the commercial agricultural use of glyphosate, estimated at two million gallons annually in Colombia and 800,000 gallons in Ecuador, with the 400,000 gallons used by the spray eradication program, of which only 20,000 were used in the area of Colombia near the border with Ecuador.

Colombia Asks for Commitment and Itself Ponies Up

11. (SBU) Calvani mentioned the visit by Colombian Vice President Francisco Santos to Vienna, where Santos asked for a more serious commitment from European countries in the fight against drugs in Colombia.

12. (SBU) Calvani highlighted Colombia's unprecedented step of contributing USD 20 million to the global war against drugs. Normally countries in Latin America are recipients of anti-narcotics funding, or donate funds to be used in their own country, such as the case of Brazil. The GOC also has donated an expropriated property to be used by the UN to consolidate all its regional offices.

13. (SBU) Ambassador Wood mentioned also the successful visit of members of the Afghan government to review all aspects of the Colombian counterdrug program and a planned follow-up visit by Colombian Anti-Narcotics Police to Afghanistan in March or April of 2006.

Demobilization, Demand Reduction, and Alternative Development

14. (SBU) On the demobilization issue, Ambassador Wood said that the group needed to back the GOC so that the areas evacuated by narco-traffickers and paramilitaries are not taken over by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

15. (SBU) Calvani said the Colombian government's demand reduction programs need updating. There was interest at the local and department level for demand reduction programs, but these depended on the good will of civil society and private enterprise.

16. (SBU) Ambassador Wood said the United States would be providing approximately USD 68 million in alternative

development assistance. He said alternative development should not be a payment for not planting coca, but rather should induce the "campesinos" to move from illicit to licit crops. Sustainable rural development is a constant concern of the U.S. Embassy. Colombia has the third highest number of internally displaced persons in the world. The GOC must create the necessary security conditions for the displaced to return to their homes and become economically independent. The EU representative said the EU wants to reinforce assistance to alternative development programs in Colombia.

17. (SBU) Calvani said that the GOC was doing a poor job of mobilizing public opinion on many issues - spraying, glyphosate use, etc. Many Colombians were ignorant of important programs in Colombia, such as the "Laboratorios de Paz" (Peace Labs).

Money Laundering, Trafficking Patterns, and Precursors

18. (SBU) The Spanish chair said that Colombia's borders with Venezuela, Brazil, and Ecuador were of special concern. Calvani was in agreement that more trafficking is going towards the south. He said that new drug smuggling routes were going through Africa--especially Nigeria, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire--substituting for traditional routes across the Atlantic

19. (SBU) Calvani reported that the UNODC is implementing a program, based in Bogota, for regional conferences or seminars on precursor chemical control for governmental country representatives and the private sector. The EU representative said that the EU wants to establish a database for the registry of precursor chemical shipments.

20. (U) The meeting concluded with the Spanish chair promising an annual report for member countries.

WOOD